

Hamilton Field, Post Chapel
(Facility No. 531)
Escolta Avenue at 7th Street
Novato
Marin County
California

HABS No. CA-2398-CO

HABS
CAL
21-NOVA,
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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
San Francisco, California

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HAMILTON FIELD
Post Chapel
(Facility No. 531)

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HABS No. CA-2398-CO

Location: Hamilton Army Air Field
Novato, Marin County, California
Post Chapel
Facility No. 531 (Escolta Avenue and 7th Street)

U.S.G.S.: Novato, CA. Quadrangle (7.5' series), 1954 (revised 1980)
Petaluma Point, CA. Quadrangle (7.5' series), 1959 (revised 1980)
UTM Coordinates: Zone 10; A: 542100/4213620; B: 544720/4212220;
C: 542760/4210650; D: 541040/4212600

Present Owner: U. S. Navy, Washington, D. C.

Present Occupant: U. S. Navy

Present Use: Children's day care center

Statement of Significance:

This building was constructed in 1942 and was one of several temporary chapel facilities located on base. Religious services for a variety of faiths and Christian denominations were provided for the men and women stationed at Hamilton.

See narrative for Hamilton Field (HABS No. CA-2398) for a comprehensive Statement of Significance and individual report HABS No. CA-2398-F for a condensed general Statement of Significance.

PART I: HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. **Date of Erection:** The post chapel was erected during the second phase of construction on base, in response to World War II build up. It was completed February 27, 1942 (Hamilton Facility Cards 1933-1971).
2. **Architect:** Buildings constructed on base during World War II were designed by staff with the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers. Many buildings, including the chapel, were based on plans modified from standard plans generated by Army architects in Washington, D.C. Given the transient nature of Army staff during the war years, and the tendency for architects and engineers to initial plans rather than use a full signature, the architect is unknown.
3. **Original Owner:** Hamilton Field is on land originally owned by private individuals and companies. In 1930, the California Packing Company sold 630 acres of land to Marin County to use to entice the Army to build on the site. An additional 161 acres were purchased from Dr. T. Peter and Julia Bodkin. These parcels were combined with other County-owned land, and in 1932 Marin County sold a 927-acre parcel of land to the Department of the Army for \$1.00 for use by the Army Air Corps as an air field. In 1947 Hamilton Air Field was transferred to the newly-formed U. S. Air Force and renamed Hamilton Air Force Base. In 1974 the U. S. Congress declared the installation excess to military needs and closed the base (Maniery et al. 1993). The Post Chapel was transferred to the U. S. Navy in 1974 and remains in Navy ownership in 1995.
4. **Builder, Contractor, Supplier:** The chapel was built by an unknown contractor under the supervision of the Quartermaster's Corps for a cost of \$29,400.00.
5. **Original Plans and Construction:** Original plans for the chapel were drawn on vellum using pencil by U. S. Army Corps architects. The plans are filed at the National Archives, Pacific Division, in San Bruno, California, and can be accessed through the U. S. Navy. A facility card for the chapel, including a photograph taken at completion of construction and another historical photograph, are on file at the Hamilton Room, Novato History Museum, in Novato, California.
6. **Alterations/Additions:** The southeast wing was added after 1952. The chapel was converted to a day care center in the 1970s. This entailed removing pews, and adding a bathroom and an office in an addition to the south side of the building. The main building mass and bell tower, however, have not been altered.

B. Historical Context:

See narrative for Hamilton Field (HABS No. CA-2398) and Section B in report HABS No. CA-2398-F.

Fran and Ray Kretz, both stationed at Hamilton during World War II, were married in the chapel in 1944. They recalled the sense of community when members of all denominations gathered together to pray during this time. They also remembered the simplicity of interior furnishings and the "New England" feel of the quaint chapel.

PART II: ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. **Architectural Character:** During the war years the population of the base increased more than twenty-fold. To meet the needs of transient soldiers, temporary and semi-permanent frame structures were erected everywhere, filling the spaces between the original buildings on base. A handful of the buildings constructed during this period had some architectural detailing. The post chapel was constructed in a simple architectural style and shape popular for rural churches for over 100 years. Most other base buildings erected during this time period, however, have no distinguishing architectural features and were simply modified on the interior to meet the functional needs of clinics, offices, theaters, laundries, or day rooms.

2. **Condition of fabric:** The building has been maintained and upgraded in recent years and is in excellent condition.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. **Overall dimensions:** The Post Chapel is a two-story rectangular frame structure with a bell tower; a one-story perpendicular wing projects from the south side of the rear. The main building measures 81 feet by 63 feet 7 inches and the one story wing is 31 feet by 10 feet. The main section of the chapel consists of a two-story nave, accessed by a central vestibule flanked by small rooms with a choir loft above.

2. **Foundation:** The foundation is constructed of poured-in-place reinforced concrete that varies from one to two feet in height. A portion of the rear addition is elevated on wood posts set in concrete.

3. **Walls:** The chapel is clad in wooden seven-inch round-edge horizontal drop siding over building paper.

4. **Structural systems, framing:** The building is constructed with a wooden balloon frame. The roof is supported by eight exposed vaulted wooden trusses.

5. **Porches, stoops, balconies, bulkheads:** The primary entrance is reached via a concrete stoop, recessed beneath a small gable-roofed portico. Wood stoops with two-by four-inch railing are also present on the east side of the wing. A wood stoop with a small, shed roof portico supported by two four-inch-square posts is present on the southwest corner of the building.

6. **Chimneys:** A metal ventilator protrudes from the roof on the rear of the chapel.

7. **Openings:**

a. **Doorways/doors:** The central front entrance consists of double, three panel wooden doors. Side entry doors are solid core wood with two or three recessed panels. A hollow core plywood door accesses the rear addition. The east entry door has nine lights over a recessed panel.

b. **Windows/shutters:** The windows in the nave are 16/16 light sash with frosted glass. Originally there were six sets, now there are five sets on the north side and four on the south. Other windows in the main chapel consist of 6/6 lights, four on the front facade and two on each story flanking the central entry way. Windows in the classroom wing are wood frame with 16 lights.

8. **Roof:**

a. **Shape/covering:** The chapel has a low-pitched front gable roof covered with composition shingles. There is a shed-roofed addition on the rear. The southeast wing has a gable roof covered with composition shingles.

b. **Cornice/eaves:** The roof has overhanging eaves with eave boards and a simple cornice molding.

c. **Dormers, cupolas, towers:** A bell tower is located on the central front of the main structure. It has a louvered lantern and a four-sided spire with a cornice of exposed rafters, wooden louvers on the front and rear, and a steeply pitched roof covered with composition shingles. A cross protrudes from the top.

C. **Description of Interior:**

1. **Floor Plans:**

a. **First Floor:** The primary access to the chapel is through a central entrance and vestibule. The vestibule is flanked by two small offices on the south side and two bathrooms on the north. The nave, which is entered directly from the

vestibule, consists of a large two-story room with a raised dais and sanctuary at the west end. The original altar and altar rail have been removed. A bathroom and several small rooms are located behind the altar and were added on after 1952. The south wing contains four classrooms, a kitchen, bath, and closets that were once confessionals.

b. **Second Floor.** A choir loft is located on the second story above the offices and bathrooms.

2. **Stairways:** A concrete stairway, with six steps, leads to the front entry. The railings and posts are of two- by four-inch frame construction. An enclosed stairway leads to the choir loft from the southwest side of the vestibule. It has wooden risers and rubber treads. The railing is made of wooden two- by four-inch lumber. A wood wall-mounted ladder provides access to the bell tower.

3. **Flooring:** The subflooring for the building is wood. The nave is covered in tongue and groove pine, the vestibule in grey and white eight-inch square asphalt tile, and the choir loft in brown asphalt tile. There are three risers in the choir loft, each with metal edges. Flooring in the classroom wing consists of eight-inch square grey asphalt tiles.

4. **Wall/ceiling finish:** The vestibule and stairway walls and ceiling are covered with vertical knotty pine wainscoting, varnished to a deep orange tone. The walls of the nave are covered with horizontal panels of composition board, while the ceiling is covered with tongue and groove boards, laid in a diagonal pattern. The offices have acoustical tile ceilings. The rooms to the rear of the altar are painted wood, while those in the classroom wing are plaster board.

5. **Openings:**

a. **Doorways/doors:** The office doors consist of solid core wood with four lights over three recessed panels or six recessed panels. The door on the south rear of the nave has six lights over two recessed panels. Doors in the classroom wing are wooden hollow core. Vestibule doors have simple wood trim.

b. **Windows:** A large horizontal window provides viewing from one of the small offices into the nave and may once have been used for parents attending services with young children.

6. **Decorative features/trim:** There are two square posts and a simple railing in the choir loft. The sanctuary is on a raised dais and is vaulted. Cabinets with vertical board doors, shell-shaped hinges, and thumbblatches are located in the wing hallway.

7. Hardware: The exterior hardware on the entry doors consists of brass double thumbblatch locks. Standard interior hardware consists of metal skeleton key lock sets with round knobs. Brass panic bars provide egress from the main doors.

8. Mechanical equipment:

a. Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: There are two main circular fans with condenser coils in the interior peak of the chapel. The original heating system consisted of low pressure steam delivered by two pipes to radiators and forced convection units made by Trane Company. A "Faraday" fire alarm system was recently installed.

b. Kitchen Appliances: None.

c. Ventilation: The bell tower and the nave are ventilated with wooden louvers. A metal pipe ventilates the rear addition.

d. Lighting: Lighting in the nave is provided by two rows of fixtures suspended from roof trusses by chains and rods. The shades are cylindrical and made of fiberglass. Each fixture holds three lights. Modern stepped inverted ceiling-mounted fixtures are in the vestibule. The adult bathroom has ceiling-mounted porcelain canopy lights. There are metal ceiling-mounted lights in the classroom wing, as well as two-tube fluorescents.

e. Plumbing: The main bathrooms off the vestibule have been renovated to accommodate preschool-aged children and have low, small toilets and sinks. The adult bathroom has an original wall-mounted "Crane" sink and a "Crane Saneto" toilet with a new plastic lid. A urinal has been removed. A cast iron mop sink is also present. Other bathrooms contain original "Standard" toilets and new "Crane" toilets and urinals.

9. Original Furnishings: The only original furnishings noted were the 12 wooden pews in the nave. These have been moved aside to make room for the children's center.

D. Site:

1. General site orientation: The chapel facade faces northeast. The building is located on a flat site between rolling hills studded with oak trees. Tennis courts adjoin the chapel on its northwest side, while the stone walls of the amphitheater and the filled-in swimming pool are located to the rear of the building. An asphalt parking lot, partially paved for a playground, surrounds the building.

2. Historic landscape design: Captain Nurse's overall plan for base design included thoughtful use of rock walls, terracing, and plantings to create a visual effect that was continued, in a more limited fashion, during World War II. Rock terracing throughout the original base served to simultaneously separate individual residences while visually uniting various sections of the base into an overall city-like plan. They were built as part of the final phase of original post construction in 1935 (Hamilton Official Photographs 1934-1935). Foundation and accent plantings, tree-lined streets, and retention of natural oak groves and rolling hills complement the rock work.

The majority of buildings in the administration area have some landscaping, particularly around the NCO barracks. Street trees, such as Modesto ash, camphor, and various palms, are present throughout this area. Building corner and doorways are delimited by a number of conifers, the most prominent being sawara false cypress and Italian cypress. Accent trees include coast redwood and some red ironbark, which were incorporated into divider triangles and sometimes near entrances. California and Mexican fan palms and golden bamboo were prominent framers of entrances, as was the New Zealand dracaena. Foundation plantings are quite diverse and include mock orange, flowering quince, Portugal laurel, and Manukka tea tree. Japanese privet, Hollywood juniper, and heavenly bamboo appear to have been added subsequent to the late 1930s and were not part of the original landscape design on base.

The chapel has a small lawn in front and palms are present at the street; other street trees are visible. Foundation shrubs, cedars, and oaks also accent the building.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural Drawings:

See narrative for Hamilton Field (HABS No. CA-2398).

B. Historic Maps and Views:

See narrative for Hamilton Field (HABS No. CA-2398).

C. Interviews:

See narrative for Hamilton Field (HABS No. CA-2398).

D. Bibliography:

See narrative for Hamilton Field (HABS No. CA-2398).

Sources cited in this individual report are listed below.

Fine, Jesse, and Lenore Remington

1972 *Army Corps of Engineers: Construction in the U.S.* U.S. Army and World War II, Office of Military History.

Hamilton Facility Cards

1933-1971 Maintenance Cards for Base Facilities. On file, Hamilton Army Air Field Installation Office, Novato, and Hamilton Room, Novato History Museum, Novato.

Maniery, Mary L., Leslie R. Fryman, and Fred Hrusa

1993 *National Register of Historic Places Evaluation, Hamilton Army Air Field Historic District, Marin County, California.* Submitted to U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Sacramento District.

Thomason and Associates

1993 *Randolph Air Force Base, San Antonio, Texas.* Cultural Resource Survey, Final Report. Nashville, Tennessee. On file, State Office of Historic Preservation, Austin, Texas.

E. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated:

See narrative for Hamilton Field (HABS No. CA-2398).

F. Supplemental Material:

See also the project Field Record, roll 95, exposures 11-12. The chapel was being used as a pre-school during photography.

Representative floor plans of the building(s) are attached. These were drafted on site in 1994 by Keith Syda, scanned into a computer and drawn by Christopher MacDonald in 1995, and corrected and finalized by Claire Warshaw in 1996 (all PAR Environmental Services, Inc. staff).

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

Hamilton Army Air Field is owned by various federal entities including the Department of the Navy, Department of the Army, United States Coast Guard, and General Services Administration. The Army/GSA parcels are being excessed and sold to private developers. The Navy property is included in Base Closure and Realignment actions.

As part of the Army's undertaking, it has been determined in consultation with the California Office of Historic Preservation (OHP) that the excess sale will have an affect on properties at the air field, and that these properties are components of a district that is eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. Based on consultation with the OHP and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, pursuant to 36 CFR part 800, regulations implementing Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (16 U.S.C. 470f), a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) was entered into by the interested parties in March 1994. The agreement stipulated that prior to excess sale the Army must contact the HABS/HAER division at the Western Regional Office of the National Park Service, San Francisco, California, to determine the appropriate level and kind of recordation for the subject properties. The MOA further stipulated that copies of the documentation be made available to the OHP and appropriate local archives designated by the OHP. This recordation has been prepared in order to meet those stipulations.

The title page, Part I, and Part III were prepared by Mary L. Maniery, Historian, PAR Environmental Services, Sacramento. Architectural descriptions in Part II were compiled by Judith Marvin, Historian/Architectural Historian, Foothill Resources, Murphys, California. Descriptions were checked against photographs and plans by Mary L. Maniery and were embellished and corrected, as necessary. Information on historic landscape design was extracted by Mary L. Maniery from a report prepared by Dr. Fred Hrusa, Botanist, PAR Environmental Services. Floor plans were drafted by Keith Syda, were drawn by Christopher MacDonald, all with PAR Environmental Services. Photography was prepared by David DeVries, Mesa Technical, Berkeley, California.

